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BY

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ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR, M.P.

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NEW YORK, BOMBAY, AND CALCUTTA
1913

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PREFACE

THE following pages are reprinted, with slight alterations, from the *University Magazine* (Montreal) for October.

It may seem absurd for anyone who has made so many speeches about Home Rule as the present writer, to add a pamphlet to the mass of controversial matter for which he is already responsible. His justification, or his excuse, is that both in Parliament and on the platform certain fundamental arguments are apt to be slurred over or neglected amid the detailed discussion of a very complicated measure. Some of these arguments are indicated in the following pages. The author has endeavoured to state them in a form which shall be as concise as is compatible with clearness, and which cannot cause offence even to those who must profoundly differ from his conclusions.

A. J. B.

NATIONALITY AND HOME RULE

IS there an Irish problem? If there be an Irish problem, what is its character and what is its origin? Can the Home Rule Bill now before Parliament do anything substantial towards its solution? These are the questions which every citizen of the United Kingdom, and, in a less degree, every citizen of the Empire, is bound to ask; for on the answers given must depend the immediate future of the country. The subject is so complex that it cannot be embraced within the limits of a brief article like the present. It is so controversial that an impartial treatment of it is almost beyond the reach of human endeavour. Yet there are one or two broad issues on which even now it may be worth while to say something; for in the heat of debate and the clash of disputes aroused by minor issues they are apt to be forgotten or ignored.

The first question of those which I began by asking must without doubt be answered in the affirmative. There *is* an Irish problem. Its gravity may be a matter of dispute, but its reality is beyond question. But what exactly is its character, and how has it arisen? Evidently we have not here to do with the ordinary case—familiar enough in history—of a down-trodden nationality. Ireland is neither

robbed nor oppressed. It is not exploited in the interests of British financiers or of British taxpayers. If there is exploiting, it is the other way. Far from Ireland not having its fair share in the councils of the United Kingdom, it has far more than its fair share. It sends more than its proportionate number of representatives to the British Parliament, as is admitted by everybody, including the authors of the Home Rule Bill. But, in addition to this, it has in every English and Scottish city an important section of the population who vote avowedly and openly as Irishmen, in favour of the candidate indicated by Nationalist Whips and supporting the policy of Nationalist leaders. I do not complain—far from it; I merely insist that no Irishman, wherever he lives, who knows the circumstances of this country, who knows the conditions under which members are sent to Westminster to represent the people of the United Kingdom, will for one instant pretend that Ireland has not her share, and more than her share, of parliamentary power. If, therefore, Ireland has a national grievance, it is one of a somewhat unusual type. She is in the position, singular among "oppressed" nationalities, of enjoying more than her fair proportion of representation in the Imperial Parliament, and paying less than her fair proportion of taxation to Imperial objects.

If, then, we want to find the justification for Home Rule, we must look elsewhere. We shall never find it either in the existing parliamentary system or in the existing financial system. There, if there *be* grievances, they are British, not Irish.

Where, then, lies the Irish difficulty? English supporters of Home Rule give us scant information on this point. They talk about the congestion of parliamentary business. They talk about the embarrassments which the Irish question has caused to successive governments. There *is* congestion; and there *are* embarrassments; but they do not constitute the Irish question. The difficulty does not lie there, and everybody who takes the trouble to enquire may easily convince himself that it does not lie there. Where does it lie? It lies in the fact that the Irish Nationalist party claim that Ireland, *on the ground of her separate nationality*, possesses inherent rights which cannot be satisfied by the fairest and fullest share in the parliamentary institutions of the United Kingdom. What satisfies Scotland cannot satisfy them, and ought not to satisfy them. It would be treason to Ireland.

The sentiment of nationality is one of a group of such sentiments for which there is unfortunately no common name. Loyalty, whether to a country or a party, fidelity to a cause, to a national sovereign, to a tribal chief, to a church, to a race, to a creed or school of thought, are characteristic specimens of the class. They may be mistaken, they often are mistaken. Nevertheless they make human society possible; they do more, they make it noble. It is such sentiments which induce a man to sacrifice ease, and profit, and perhaps life itself, for something which wholly transcends his narrow personal interests. Therefore, whether mistaken or not, there is always

in them an element of greatness; and even if I thought that an Irishman should forget in what part of the United Kingdom he was born—and I think exactly the reverse—I should still regard his feelings of patriotism as worthy of respect.

But patriotism, though it expresses a simple feeling, need have no exclusive application. It may embrace a great deal more than a man's country or a man's race. It may embrace a great deal less. And these various patriotisms need not be, and should not be, mutually exclusive. As civilisation advances, it becomes more and more necessary for men to learn how they are to be combined without being weakened; how a narrow provincialism is to be avoided on the one side, and a selfish indifference, masquerading under the name of enlightened cosmopolitanism, is to be shunned on the other.

As a matter of fact, some combination of different patriotisms is almost universal among thinking persons. If I consider the case I know best (namely, my own), I find that, within a general regard for mankind, which I hope is not absent nor weak, I am moved by a feeling, especially patriotic in its character, for the group of nations who are the authors and the guardians of western civilisation, for the subgroup which speaks the English language, and whose laws and institutions are rooted in British history, for the communities which compose the British Empire, for the United Kingdom of which I am a citizen, and for Scotland, where I was born, where I live, and where my fathers lived before me. Where

patriotisms such as these are not forced into conflict, they are not only consistent with each other, but they may mutually reinforce each other; and statesmanship can have no greater object than to make conflict between them impossible.

It is easy to see, even from this very summary statement, how various are the centres round which patriotic sentiment may crystallise. Its occasion may be found in a real or supposed community of race, of language, of religion, of institutions, of culture. It may be due to geographical conditions; or it may be the offspring of common memories, or of common hopes, or of common interests. Only of this we may be sure, that whatever its real origin or justification, it will endeavour to draw nourishment from all sources, and will be especially apt to justify its existence by a version of history which at the best is one-sided, at the worst is purely mythical. Therefore beware!

Now what is there in the character of Irish patriotism which, in the case of the southern and western portions of the Island, produces or keeps alive the desire to break up the Union? It is not the sense of present grievance, either agrarian, financial, or administrative. The agrarian difficulty is in the way of solution under the Wyndham (and other) Acts: the financial position is more favourable to Ireland than to Great Britain; the administrative grievance is largely imaginary. What then is it?

Judging by Nationalist speeches you might suppose that it was the destruction by England of Irish

institutions, built up by an Irish race, and giving political unity to an Irish nation. On this theory Ireland is a kind of Poland, deprived by stronger neighbours of its constitution and its independence: so that the proper remedy is now to undo this ancient wrong, and to give back to the Irish race in Ireland that of which they should never have been deprived.

I believe this view, held more or less explicitly by most Irishmen of Nationalist leanings throughout the world and by many who are not Irishmen, is at the root of all the sentiment which has lain behind the Home Rule propaganda from the days of O'Connell to the present moment. But in truth it is a complete delusion. The history on which it is based is imaginary history. Ireland has often in centuries gone by been hardly used by her more powerful neighbours. But she has never been deprived of her national organisation, for she never possessed one. Ask an Irish Nationalist what institution he desires to see restored to his native country. If he replies at all, the institution he names will almost certainly prove to be of English origin, and to have been abolished because it failed. This at all events is unquestionably true of the Irish Parliament that once sat in Dublin. Nor is the case different with literature, or law, or parliamentary eloquence. In all these great departments of human activity men born in Ireland have done splendid work. But it has been in adding to the masterpieces of English literature, in moulding or administering English law, in adorning assemblies of English origin.

And mark well that this is no fault of the Irish, or, for that matter, of the English either. It is due to the historic accident that the first effective contact between England and Ireland took place at a period when the political system of the former, backward as we rightly deem it, was yet incomparably superior to the tribal organisation which still prevailed in Ireland. So at least I interpret the course of events; but whether I be right or wrong, this, at least, is certain, that the English invader, whatever his crimes, found nothing and destroyed nothing in the Ireland of the twelfth (or later) centuries which could by any possibility be restored to the Ireland of the twentieth.

But granting, it may be replied, that Nationalist hostility to the Union or to Britain cannot be justified on the ground that Britain has destroyed an Irish civilization, may it not find a surer base in the opinion that the Union yokes together men of different race in one artificial and unworkable system? And is not the system unworkable because the men that have to work it *are* of different race?

On this question of race there seems to me much exaggeration and error. We who live now in the United Kingdom, or whose fathers emigrated thence to the new countries of the West, are doubtless of mixed descent, and doubtless the mixture is variously compounded in different districts. But there is not, so far as I know, the slightest reason for supposing that the difference is greater between Ireland and Great Britain than between parts of England and

Wales, or between the Highlands of Scotland and the Lowlands. Indeed if any doctrinaire is going to preach the reconstitution of the United Kingdom on the basis of anthropology, he will never be content with the simple plan of Home Rule all round. He would among other small changes have to transfer the southern frontier of Scotland from the Tweed at least as far north as the Forth,—I think much further: a proceeding to which I for one would most strongly object. If race and blood be the essential root of Nationalist theories as applied to the United Kingdom, the Scotland of history must perish, and Ulster must be divided from the rest of Ireland.

If then neither Irish institutions, nor Irish culture, nor Irish descent be a sufficient ground for the claim of Home Rule, can we find that ground in its geographical isolation? It is a perilous argument; for geographical isolation is at the mercy of mechanical knowledge; and it changes with the progress of invention under our very eyes. If anything is certain in hypothetical history it is that there never would have been a separate Parliament on College Green had Dublin always been within ten hours of London. I quite understand that a system of subordinate provinces may be convenient in a country of vast area and scattered populations. But to acknowledge separate nationality, or even to create a separate administration, in a district which is neither remote nor difficult of access, for no other reason than that it is surrounded by water, seems to be a highly irrational use of geographical information.

Perhaps at this point in my argument my reader will be disposed to say to me, "You began by admitting that there was an Irish difficulty; you have since been occupied in proving (or attempting to prove) that the difficulty was not due to certain causes often alleged in explanation of it. But of what importance is this if the difficulty exists? You cannot cure a disease merely by exposing an incorrect diagnosis. So far you have not even suggested a diagnosis of your own."

The nature of the disease I have indicated. It is a sentiment of hostile and exclusive local patriotism, which deems itself outraged by the full inclusion of the locality on any terms, even the most generous, within a larger national unit. But if this be its nature, what is its explanation if we exclude as irrelevant or negligible differences of race, of institutions, of culture, or of geographical position?

The explanation is to be found in the tragic coincidences of Irish history. The circumstances attending the slow increase of British power were in themselves a great misfortune. If Ireland had remained isolated from her neighbours she might gradually have evolved central institutions and a civilised polity of her own. If her warring clans had been rapidly and effectually subdued, as the Highland clans were subdued after the '45, the native Irish population might have immediately shared the advantages of the more advanced social and economic polity with which she had become associated. But

nothing could have been worse both for the English and the Irish than what actually occurred. Long continued guerilla warfare is the most demoralising of all forms of warfare; and it never took a more demoralising form than it did in Ireland. To the English it was of slow and dubious advantage; to the Irish it was sheer loss. Yet the melancholy story would long ago have been forgotten and forgiven but for sectarian differences and agrarian wrongs. Unhappily it was impossible anywhere, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to exclude religion from politics; and it was certainly impossible in Ireland. Do not, however, let us suppose that either the Protestants or the Roman Catholics concerned were of a type peculiarly bigoted or vindictive. As far as my knowledge goes this was not so. But unfortunately Ireland was dragged by British statesmen into the English and Scottish civil wars: in these religion and politics were inextricably mingled; and the final defeat of James the Second left the majority of Irishmen convinced that the cause of Ireland was the cause of Roman Catholicism, and the majority of Englishmen convinced that the cause of Protestantism was the cause of Liberty. Ireland was divided into two camps; and divided into two camps she still remains.

What wars and massacres, confiscation and reconfiscation could not have done, has been effected by the combination of these with religious oppression. And though the days I am speaking of are long gone by, they have left behind them a tradition

still sufficient to confer on Irish patriotism of the Nationalist type an anti-British flavour.

What, in these circumstances, should British statesmen do? In my personal opinion—I speak for no one but myself—there are only two policies open to them. They may maintain the Union and keep Ireland in full political communion with England and Scotland. Or they may give Ireland (with or without Ulster), complete autonomy, requiring her to manage her own finances, pay her own bills, borrow on her own credit, control her own rebels, settle her own constitution;—remaining, if she so desire it, a self-governing colony within the limits of the Empire.

This is evidently a counsel of despair. None of the great Dominions—not Canada, nor Australia, nor South Africa—would tolerate such a severance of their territories as is implied in this scheme. The United States has fought the bloodiest war of modern times in order to avoid it. Must we submit where they would resist? In my opinion, never.

Yet the remedy, however desperate, is apparently suited to the disease. It gives Nationalist Ireland what it professes to desire: it should satisfy Irish patriotism in its narrowest and most hostile form. And those who really think that Ireland is a nation unrighteously held in bondage, or who deem that whether this be true or not, the majority of Irishmen will always think so, are bound to consider it. It is at least a solution of the Irish Nationalist problem; and this is more than can be said for Home Rule in any of its various shapes.

But if this complete surrender be regarded as impossible, can the alternative policy be persevered with? Can we remain as we are, refusing any concession to that hostile form of Irish patriotism whose origin I have endeavoured briefly to explain, and even in a measure to excuse?

I think we can; and I think so (in part) because neither reason nor experience suggests that this sentiment is destined to be eternal. Even now signs are not wanting that it is undergoing the same kind of change which has (for example) converted loyalty to the Stuart dynasty from a practical creed to a historic emotion. And the reasons are analogous. The wars and confiscations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the religious and economic injustices of the eighteenth, are long passed away; and there is no reason known to me why they should disturb the unity of the United Kingdom more permanently than the internecine horrors of the Thirty Years' War disturb the unity of a United Germany. If indeed Nationalists were expected by Unionists to sell their birthright, if the larger patriotism of a citizen of the Three Kingdoms was, in its essential nature, incompatible with the affection separately owed to each one by its children, we might well despair. But as I have tried to show, this is not the case. And even now those who will take the trouble to enquire may easily convince themselves how much there is of genuine Irish Nationalism which has no real desire either for independence or for Home Rule.

"But," it will perhaps be here objected, "you have so far not argued the case of Home Rule at all. You have discussed autonomy and (potential) separation; you have discussed the maintenance of the Union. The middle policy of Home Rule you have not discussed at all."

This is true. And the reason is that if the Irish difficulty is due to Irish Nationalism, Home Rule does not deserve to be described as a policy at all. It provides no solution of any Irish problem, or British problem either. It is not a constitutional remedy; it is a parliamentary device.

A very few words will make this clear. If the subject be approached from the side of Irish nationality, which is the line of approach suggested by history and followed in this paper, the absurdities of Home Rule lie on the surface of the measure. The limitations imposed on the new Irish Parliament are such as were never desired by England in the case of the American Colonies before the War of Independence; nor would they ever be tolerated by any one of the self-governing Dominions. How then can they be permanently accepted by those whose policy is professedly based on the indefeasible claims of Irish Nationality? And if it be replied that the Nationalist members profess themselves content, we are compelled to ask by what right they attempt thus to set limits to the aspirations, in their opinion the just aspirations, of their fellow-countrymen, either now or hereafter?

If again the subject be approached from the side

of constitutional equity or administrative convenience, the Bill is utterly without defence. No doubt there are many persons who think that a large delegation of parliamentary power to subordinate assemblies would be a great constitutional reform. I am not disposed to agree with them; but the case is arguable. What is not arguable is the supposition that the Home Rule Bill is a serious contribution to this object. There is not in it from beginning to end the faintest indication that its authors ever supposed that its provisions could be applied to other parts of the United Kingdom; nor could they ever be so applied. In the meanwhile it leaves Ireland grossly over-represented in the Imperial Parliament so far as English and Scottish affairs are concerned, and grossly under-represented so far as Imperial affairs are concerned. It gives the Irish much more power than they ought to have in moulding legislation which applies only to Great Britain, and much less power than they ought to have in controlling national policy and national taxation. How can such a system last in Ireland? How can it be extended to England or Scotland? How can it be seriously regarded as the solution of any problem whatever,—national, constitutional, or administrative?

But if it solves no problem, it raises many, and of these the most urgent is Ulster. To the ordinary Radical voter in England or Scotland the evils of Home Rule may appear shadowy and remote. He regards the Irish question as a nuisance of long-standing, and, if his leaders assure him that their

scheme is going to bring it to an end, he is prepared to submit and pay. Very different is the feeling in the north-east of Ireland. There the maintenance of the Union is not deemed a matter of convenience or of personal sentiment: it is a matter of life and death; and as such, it will most certainly be treated.

And have the men of Ulster no justification for such a view? If the Irish of the south and west have an inherent moral right to claim administrative separation from the United Kingdom, has not Ulster an equal right to claim administrative separation from the rest of Ireland? If the Nationalist demand be founded upon race, is not Ulster in this respect as different from the rest of Ireland as the rest of Ireland is from England? If the Irish Nationalists profess to approve a plan which, like the Home Rule Bill, limits their rights as citizens of the United Kingdom, why should the wider patriotism of Ulster consent to the sacrifice? The Roman Catholics of the south and west certainly would not have considered themselves secure if, under whatever paper safeguards, they were placed in the power of the Ulster Protestants. Why should the Ulster Protestants be content to be placed in the power of Leinster, Munster, and Connaught? And if it be said that such a view ignores the modern spirit of religious toleration, I would remind the reader of what I have already insisted upon, namely, the historic part which religious differences have so unhappily played in the creation of the Irish problem. If England, through her misfortune or her

fault, has been responsible for making Nationalist Ireland what it is, not less has she been responsible for making Unionist Ulster what it is; and the idea that Britain can save herself all further trouble by a partial and half-hearted withdrawal from Ireland, retaining the duty of protecting minorities, but abandoning all power of doing so effectually, seems to me to be, from the point of view of expediency, amazingly short-sighted, and, from the point of view of ethics, profoundly immoral.

My conclusion, then, from the arguments which I have indicated rather than expressed in any developed form, may be summarised as follows: The Irish problem, now that all Irish grievances connected with land, religion, and finance have been removed, is essentially due to the exclusive and often hostile form which Irish patriotism outside Ulster has assumed.

This finds no justification either in differences of race or in the memories of native institutions destroyed by foreign usurpation.

It has its origin in the unhappy circumstances of Irish history, and especially in the inevitable fusion, both in fact and in the memory of the Roman Catholic Irish, of wrongs due to religious divisions with others that followed on the heels of rebellion and civil war.

The memory of these unhappy events was kept alive long after the events were over by the social irritation due to one of the worst systems of land tenure which has ever existed; and though this and all the other causes which have produced the

Irish problem are now removed, their effects, as is inevitable, survive them.

Those who think, as I do, that these effects are diminishing, and are destined to disappear, look forward to a time when Irish patriotism will as easily combine with British patriotism as Scottish patriotism combines now. They ask only for time, and not much of that. Although more than eighty years have passed since Roman Catholic disabilities were removed, yet it is only about a quarter of a century since the problem presented by the congested districts in Ireland began to receive special treatment; it is only about fifteen years since local government on a popular basis was set up; it is only about ten years since the land system was remodelled under the Wyndham Acts; and only about five years since provision was made to meet the special wants of the Roman Catholics in respect of University education. Measured by the standard of a nation's life such figures are insignificant. Give these remedial measures a chance, and do not in the meanwhile meddle with the constitution of the United Kingdom for other than purely administrative reasons. To those who reject this policy, who think that Irish patriotism, in its exclusive and more or less hostile form, is destined to be eternal, I would respectfully say that they must seriously face the question of giving Ireland outside Ulster complete autonomy even though this involves potential separation. Such a policy, however ruinous to Ireland, and however perilous to Great Britain, would at least satisfy the

most extreme claims of Irish nationality; and nothing else will.

For these claims, if they are genuine, can never be satisfied by the Home Rule Bill; and if that Bill were really to put an end to the Nationalist agitation, it would be conclusive proof that the agitation was factitious, and that the cause of Irish patriotism in its exclusive form was already lost.

But if Home Rule cannot really satisfy Nationalist aspirations, from every other point of view it stands condemned. Financially, administratively, and constitutionally, it is indefensible; and considered from these points of view few indeed are the Home Rulers who sincerely attempt to defend it.

ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR.

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